

Ryan Padraig Kelly

Dear Raven,

What's your name? My mama doesn't know, and I asked her to ask your mama, but she said she doesn't want to go anywhere near your house. I told her that's mean because she doesn't know you.

None of us do. I've only seen you from across the street. You have black hair, and it's very dark, which is why I call you Raven. If you tell me your real name I will use it.

Is black your favorite color? You wear it a lot. I've never seen you wear anything but that black dress with the poofy sleeves and lacy

collar. Or are you sad because someone in your family has died? My mama said that black is a color for being sad, and for funerals. I've never been to one. My favorite color is all of them.

Do you go to school? I've never seen you there, and I think there's only one. Do you have many friends? I have lots. They wave at me when they see me and say hi when I'm walking down the street. Sometimes I forget their names, so I make up names in my head, like there's this red-haired girl I call Poppy, and this boy who only brings peanut butter and honey sandwiches for lunch, so I call him

Honey, because the peanut butter isn't the unusual part. His hair is also yellow like honey.

What do you eat for lunch? I don't think it would be peanut butter and honey sandwiches. I imagine you eating raspberries.

Tell me what your name is so I can use it.

Sincerely,

Robin

P.S. Did I spell that word right?

Sincerely? I asked my mama how to spell it but I don't think she's very good at that sort of thing.

Dear Robin,

I've seen you across the street too. You live in a white house with light blue shutters. Your screen door is white metal bent into a bunch of nice-looking old shapes. I can hear when someone lets it go and it slams against the door frame.

Did you know you have a bird's nest in your rain gutter? It's a blackbird, I think.

I don't have a favorite color. I do have a favorite dress, and it is black. My mother says it looks very well with my hair and that it makes my eyes look like sea glass. She wants to take me to the sea.

Black is a color for being sad. I am not sad.

I don't go to school. My mother teaches me things. She taught me to read and write and do math.

After we're done I go to the park and sit on the swings. The left one, not the right. I watch leaves fall from the trees. I don't have any friends, because no one talks to me. I've seen the boy you call Honey at the park; I know because sometimes he doesn't finish his peanut butter and honey sandwich and he eats the rest of it on the bench. I can always smell it from the swings.

I don't eat peanut butter and honey sandwiches. I don't eat raspberries either.

Also sincerely,

Raven

P.S. You did spell it right.

Dear Raven,

A bird's nest! I must find it right away!

I don't know what sea glass is, but that's okay. If I get to look at your eyes one day and see what color they are, then I will know. You should go with your mama to the sea. I bet you would like it. Then you must come home and write me

a letter all about it. You must tell me what kinds of birds live there so I can tell Honey. He likes birds, and they like him.

I also have a favorite dress. It is a lot like yours, only it's white.

Your mama is your teacher? Does she know everything too? My mama says she knows everything, and that I should listen to her because of it. I wonder if it is better not to go to school. We sometimes have to hide under our desks and put our arms over our necks, or huddle in a corner with the lights off and stay very quiet. I bet you don't do those things. They don't

sound so bad, but every once in a while one of the other kids cries and the teacher has to give them a lollipop.

I was going to ask why no one talks to you, but then I remembered that I don't either. I write you letters. That makes me cowardly.

I don't recommend trying to talk to Honey; he doesn't speak much. Why don't you eat raspberries? Have you tried them? I think you would like them.

You signed your letter *Raven*. I know that's not your name. If it's a secret, you can tell me. I won't tell anyone.

Yours truly,

Robin

P.S. My mama said *yours truly* is how grownups end letters to friends.

Dear Robin,

Sea glass is glass made round and soft by the sea. They look like stones of pretty colors. My mother has a piece that she found when she was a girl on her first trip to the beach. It is the color of mint.

If I go to the sea, I will tell you about it.

My mother is my teacher. She doesn't know everything. No one

does. Indeed, we don't do those things; hiding under tables or in corners.

You are not a coward. Speaking to me is something everyone is afraid to do. It doesn't mean good things. I don't have friends.

No one wants to keep my company.

Sincerely,

Raven

Dearest Raven,

I am confused. I don't believe you've never had a friend. What could be so scary about you? Everyone is afraid of something,

but that something isn't always
you.

Besides, I am your friend.

I found the bird's nest you told me
about. I climbed out of my
bedroom window and had to kind
of shimmy down the roof to get to
it. Roofs are made of weird stuff.
But I got to it and I looked real
close at it. It's got three eggs in it,
and they're this wonderful
greenish-blue color that I didn't
know the name of until you
described sea glass to me, and now
I think about your eyes being the
same color of those eggs, and your

hair the same color as the bird who made them.

I lost my balance and fell off the roof, but it's okay because I landed in a bush. It was quite funny.

My mama told me I'm going to have a little sister. I got excited, but she said it will be a while. I don't know where they get little sisters, but it must not be very close by if it takes nine months for them to arrive. When I said that to my mama she just laughed. I told her the blackbird on the roof is having all of its children at the same time, and she said she wasn't that unlucky.

I tried a peanut butter and honey sandwich the other day, you know, and I think Honey might be on to something.

You keep saying *sincerely, Raven*. Do you not want to tell me your name? I will keep asking.

Yours truly,

Robin

Dear Robin,

I'm sorry.

I don't know what to say. I'm sorry. I know it's been a while. I finally went to the sea; my mother took me. It was very windy, and the air

tasted like salt and there were seagulls calling everywhere. I found seashells in lots of different shapes, and sand dollars too. I found you the perfect piece of sea glass; I will put it in the letter with a sand dollar, because I think you'd really like sand dollars. I learned that I don't like wet sand, and that the ocean is very cold. There was a woman there with a little plastic bag, and she sprinkled some gray stuff into the water. There was a very old man with a cane and a younger man holding his arm. The old man couldn't walk very well. The younger man looked very sad.

Robin, I'm sorry, I don't want to lie to you. I don't want to keep secrets from you anymore, but I still do.

You scared me, in your last letter, when you said you fell off your roof. It was a new feeling; I'm not used to fear like this, fear based in affection. I did not know what to do, so I ran away.

You called yourself my friend. You climbed onto your roof to see a bird's nest I told you about. You keep asking for my name.

It's funny, you know; I have been given so much attention in concept, but never in truth. I've

never had anyone be so interested in me before.

And that's the problem. Look what I've made you do. You fell off your roof because of a bird's nest that I told you about. You say you were fine, but what if you weren't?

People don't get close to me safely. There's a reason I don't have friends, Robin. But I want to keep talking to you. You're my friend, but I don't know how to be yours.

I don't know what to do.

What does your mother say?
Apparently she knows everything.

Sincerely,

Raven

P.S. Do you not know where babies come from?

My dearest Raven,

It was very nice to see your letter on my doorstep after all this time. I was worried when you did not respond. I wondered if I scared you, and then I told myself that was foolish because nothing scares you, but it seems I was wrong.

I didn't think I was your first friend. I didn't think you'd worry about me. That is new to me as well. My mom doesn't usually worry because I don't ever actually hurt myself, I just like to climb over

things and under things and through things. I've never thought to be careful for the sake of someone else.

Apparently the concept of you is as new to me as I am to you.

I've been back on the roof many times since then and I haven't fallen again. The eggs hatched, and now I can hear chirping outside my window. I took some of the broken pieces. I will give you the biggest one, because I think it's a nice thing to have. Tell me if it matches your eyes.

I asked my mom how to do something when you have good

reasons to be afraid to do it. She said if it will make me happy it will erase my fear.

You want to be a good friend to me? You've given me things that I already like more than my favorite dress. You are a different kind of person to me than anyone I know. You could only be a better friend if you give me your last secret. You say you can't keep secrets from me anymore, and you still haven't told me your name.

Yours forever,

Robin

P. S. I had my mom make the piece of sea glass into a necklace so I

can wear it all the time. And you're right, I do love the sand dollar. I promise I'll never spend it.

Dearest Robin,

I saw one of you the other day. Did you know that robins are heralds of spring? Of new life? Somehow I feel like spring is your favorite season. Is that why you call yourself Robin?

Don't ask for my last secret when you haven't given me yours.

The eggshell piece was a very nice gift, thank you. It is a strangely beautiful thing that comes from such an ordinary and common bird. The color is very like my eyes, but it is too dark. Imagine that

turquoise but lighter, and you've got it. You know, I've never asked you what color your eyes are.

I think your mother is right. But I don't think the fear ever leaves you. Maybe that is why I hid things from you. Why I still do. I tell myself that it's because you are just as guilty as I am, but maybe I am just making excuses. What do I have to lose in being honest with you?

Really, Robin. What will I lose?

Sincerely,

Raven

P. S. There was a bit of red on the sharp edges of the eggshell. Were you not careful?

Dear sly Raven,

What told you that I have secrets from you? Was I not the first to reach out? Was I not the first to write a letter?

I do really enjoy springtime. Especially when the cherry trees blossom and birds are singing every morning. The robins were my first friends, I think.

Thank you for the very clear image of your eyes. Now I can imagine your face when I write these words to you. I would wonder why we

haven't spoken in person, when only the street separates us, but I think we both already know.

My eyes are hazel, greener in the center. Does that surprise you? I was surprised to learn your eyes aren't gray, or black.

With complete sincerity I tell you that you can be honest with me. We are not enemies, Raven. We are anything but strangers. We are friends. That is not a lie. I think you know perfectly well why I first called you Raven, and it is not because you are exactly how I pictured Annabel Lee.

Will I go first, or will you? I can help you out. You don't have a mother, do you?

Yours still,

Robin

P. S. Yes, I cut my finger on the eggshell. It was sharper than I thought. Leave me alone.

Dear deceptive Robin,

How well you've come to know me. I honestly wonder what it was that made you write to me first. Very well, I will grant your wishes. I will comply with your whims, as has been the theme of our correspondence.

The robins were your first friends? I suppose that's the one thing we have in common.

Your eyes do not surprise me. They suit you. I would eventually like to have this conversation in person, but alas it is not a perfect world.

You are right. I do not have a mother. I couldn't have a mother. I live alone in my big old house because everything around me dies and I disguise myself as a child because it makes people less afraid of me. What is your excuse?

You are also right that we are far from strangers. We are enemies and partners, according to all the

philosophers and the priests and
the poets, all the p's. They would
have us wound each other and
then take turns cleaning each
other's blood. Perhaps we were
friends far sooner than we realized.

When did you realize? I've been
here a long time. I remember when
you moved in across the street.
What took you so long?

My very last secret, I'll give it up to
you, even though you've promised
me nothing in return.

I don't have a name. Only the ones
everybody knows me by.

Finally yours,

D ---

P. S. Annabel Lee? A girl after my own heart.

My dear philosophical friend,

We have more in common than birds.

I don't know, I suppose I finally found the latest hidey-hole of yours and thought, why not get to know you better? We've been in it for the long haul, and it's not going to end anytime soon.

Everything around you dies?
Everything around me grows.

I know where babies come from; I wanted to see if you'd play along.

Have to say though, I don't have a dad, so I don't know where my mom got the other half of that baby.

You turned out to be much more giving than I knew you to be. I have treasures now because of you.

Despite what you think, I have no secrets from you. You've cracked all my codes yourself. I never lied to you.

I don't know why I truly thought you had a name. I don't have one either! I like the ones we came up with for this. Could I keep calling you Raven? This is a game we could keep playing. When we grow

up we'll move to another little town
and do it all over again. There's a
strangely satisfying longing in
something fleeting.

Call me Robin, and I'll call you
Raven, and we'll fly away together.

Eternally yours,

L ---

Dear Robin,

I accept.

- Raven